

Introduction to Bibliography of De Soto Studies

by Jeffrey P. Brain and Charles R. Ewen

The search for the route of Hernando de Soto through the southeastern United States has become a consuming pursuit for many cartographers, historians, and archaeologists. Since the pioneering efforts of Guillaume Delisle in 1718, researchers have chased a variety of alternative routes.

In 1939, when John Swanton put together the *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission*, the archaeological evidence was sparse. Nearly fifty years later, Brain (1985, xlvi) summarized the progress that had been made on defining the expedition's route since the commission's report and wryly remarked "that we are far more uncertain about the exact itinerary than the Commission was."

Five years after Brain's summary, De Soto scholars are still no closer to agreement on the route and, in fact, may have become more divisive in its interpretation than ever. Swanton himself foresaw this almost forty years ago, saying, "Hernando de Soto, his expedition, and the places he visited will probably be matters of discussion for years and years" (Swanton 1952a, 311). "Discussion" could be termed a euphemism for the heated debate that the study of the expedition's route has inspired. Indeed, the debate has polarized into two opposing factions: those that choose to adhere primarily to refinements of the route proposed by Swanton and those that support the route as reinterpreted by Charles Hudson of the University of Georgia and his associates. We will not attempt a discussion of the disputed points here; rather the reader is referred to the original references presented in our bibliography.

The Purpose of the Bibliography

This bibliography is intended to aid the scholar pursuing research on topics related to Hernando de Soto's entrada in the southeastern United States. It is not intended as a general guide to the Early Contact Period in the New

World. It was difficult to set the parameters of the bibliography. Including every reference that might conceivably have some bearing on De Soto-related research would have been beyond the scope of this work and certainly beyond the endurance of the compilers. Some general references have been included because they seemed to us to be useful research tools. There may be some personal bias in their selection, as the preponderance of archaeological references betrays the archaeological backgrounds of the authors.

A special effort was made to include those sources not readily available to the casual researcher. This so-called grey literature consists mainly of unpublished manuscripts in possession of the compiler, letters to other scholars or institutions, and archaeological contract reports on file at various federal and state agencies. Several scholars, who are actively pursuing De Soto-related research, were contacted and asked to contribute their most obscure references. Their responses resulted in the compilation of some truly arcane literature.

Pains have also been taken to include all points of view expressed by the various De Soto scholars. Opinions range widely concerning where the expedition went, who they encountered, and what constitutes evidence for these conclusions. Attempts were made to be impartial in the selection process, and all references are presented in an equal fashion. Readers are invited to examine the opposing hypotheses on the various topics and draw their own conclusions.

This introductory essay discusses the De Soto literature in a topical manner. During the compilation of the references it became apparent that there were several major themes pervading the literature. They are: the route of the army, archaeological investigations, artifact studies, biographical studies, and De Soto in explicitly fictitious literature. Many of the works included in the bibliography fit into more than one category, while others were idiosyncratic and hard to fit into any general category. Not all categories that appear in the bibliography (e.g., general anthropological and historical studies) appear in this essay; however, the intent is to get the researcher off to a good start. The reader should also consult the extensive bibliography published in Swanton's *Final Report* (1939, 337-43).

The Route of the Army

The route of the De Soto entrada is one of the longest-lived and most hotly contested issues in the study of the protohistoric Southeast. The ear-

liest route version in this bibliography is Delisle's (1718) *Carte de la Louisiane et cours du Mississipi*, which graphically depicts what he thought was the track of the expedition. Other early studies of the route include Andrews (1917) and Fordyce (1929), with Swanton's 1939 report concluding the early period of research.

Tracing the entire route of the De Soto entrada is a daunting prospect, and many researchers have chosen to focus on a portion of the route. Most of these studies focus on either the search for an important site or the route within a particular state. It is these segmental studies that have provided and will provide synthesizers with their basic data. There are several key points that form the framework upon which the route is strung, and which have sparked the most heated exchanges.

The state of Florida figures prominently in the De Soto debates. Beginning with the landing site, the controversy is primarily over whether the expedition landed at Tampa Bay (Milanich 1984, 1988, 1989a, 1989b; Mitchem 1986; Swanton 1934, 1939) or farther south at Charlotte Harbor (Schell 1966; Tesar 1989; L. Williams 1986, 1989; Wilkinson 1960). A recent article (Leverette and Lawson 1990), however, suggests that De Soto landed on the east coast of Florida. Unfortunately, all of these speculations rest solely on the interpretation of the documentary evidence, since archaeological investigations have failed to corroborate any of them. There is less debate concerning the location of the first winter encampment. This is one of the few locations on the route for which there is general agreement, or at least not vehement disagreement. Preliminary documentation concerning the archaeological investigations of this site is provided by Ewen (1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1991), Ewen and Jones (1988), B. C. Jones (1988), B. C. Jones and Mitchell (1988), and Tesar and Jones (1989). General characterizations of the route through Florida appear in Blake (1987b), K. Johnson (1987), Milanich (1984, 1988, 1989a, 1990), and Milanich and Mitchem (1986). In attempting to trace the route of the earlier explorer, Pánfilo de Narváez, Scott (1981) provides useful data for interpreting the route of De Soto in Florida.

When the army left Florida and crossed into Georgia, their trail did not become any easier to follow. Much of the research concerning this part of the trail has focused on the prehistoric province of Coosa (Blake 1991b; Boyd and Schroedl 1987; Hudson 1988a, 1990a; Little and Curren, n.d.) and whether the Peachtree site in North Carolina is on the route (Anderson 1990; Eubanks 1989, 1990c; Little 1990; Setzler and Jennings 1941). Other more general works concerning the route through Georgia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee include: Andrews (1917b); Goff (1953); Hudson, Smith, and

DePratter (1984a, 1987); Hudson, Worth, and DePratter (1990); Melvin (1978); and M. Smith (1976).

Alabama holds the distinction for most avidly pursuing the route of De Soto in recent years. The Working Paper Series published by the Alabama De Soto Commission is perhaps the most useful set of recent publications pertaining to the expedition and to efforts made to locate evidence of its passing throughout the Southeast. Alabama also holds the distinction of being one of the first states to attempt to mark the route (Holmes, et al. 1989; D. Jones 1988) and yet having the least agreement as to exactly where the explorer went. Of particular concern is the location of Mauvilla, which though actively sought (Blake 1988b; Brannon 1929; DePratter, Hudson, and Smith 1985; Little 1988c) has still not been satisfactorily located. The hypotheses on where the route travels through Alabama are deeply divided, as is evident from such titles as Curren's (1988a) *A Rebuttal of the 'Georgia Reconstruction' of the Soto Route through Alabama* and (1988b) *A Rebuttal of the Blake Model* and Hudson's (1989a) *Critique of Little and Curren's Reconstruction of De Soto's Route through Alabama*. The various reconstructions of this section of the route include: Curren (1987, 1988c); Curren, Little, and Lankford (1981b); Hudson (1989b); Lankford (1977); Lankford, Curren, and Little (1980); Little (1988b, 1988e).

The route through Mississippi is no less controversial (Atkinson 1987; Brain 1984; Brain, Toth, and Rodriguez-Buckingham 1974; Evans 1940; Hudson, Smith, and DePratter 1989; Lewis 1927; Love 1921; Ward 1986; Weinstein 1985). The route through Mississippi, however, is only the precursor to the big question that transcends state boundaries and takes on a national concern. Where did De Soto "discover" the Mississippi River? This question has been addressed early by Rowland (1927a, 1927b), among others, in a symposium concerning that question. Other suggestions are offered in the segmental studies mentioned above.

Wherever they crossed, the diminished army spent the remainder of their sojourn criss-crossing Arkansas and may have even ventured into Missouri (Burgess 1967/1968; Eubanks 1990b) and Louisiana. The debate has been less bitter west of the Mississippi, but a definitive route is still to be marked. Works on the Arkansas portion of the route include: Akridge (1986); Dickinson (1986); Hudson (1985); Hudson and Morse (n.d.); Mixon (1917); Morse and Morse (1990); Swanton (1952b). Schambach (1989) discusses the route from southwest Arkansas into Texas, while Bryan (1956), Strickland (1942), J. Williams (1942), Woldert (1942), and others still in press (Hudson;

Kenmotsu, Bruseth, and Corbin; Schambach) follow the trail of De Soto's successor, Luis Moscoso, in Texas.

Charles Hudson, in 1988, under contract to the National Park Service, synthesized the segments he and his colleagues had researched and offered an alternative to the Swanton route (1988b). This was later published with DePratter and Smith (1989) and released as a final report by the Park Service in 1990. It was not without its detractors, as is evidenced in Curren (1991a), Little (1988d), and Little and Curren (1990c). The controversy eventually became such that the National Park Service declined to recommend that Congress designate the trail as a National Historic Trail, citing difficulties in marking its route because of lack of agreement among the principal researchers.

Archaeological Investigations

One advantage that contemporary researchers have over the 1939 De Soto Expedition Commission is that a great deal of archaeological work pertinent to the De Soto expedition has been conducted in the last fifty years. Most of it has been merely suggestive, rather than definitive, yet it has contributed to a better understanding of the De Soto entrada and the indigenous societies they met. The archaeological literature is divided into regional syntheses and site-specific investigations. Only a few of these studies will be mentioned here, and the reader is urged to consult the bibliography itself for a more thorough coverage of the archaeological literature.

Regional accounts that deal with the expedition itself and the proto-historic peoples of the Southeast are available for most of the route. These include: Brain, Toth, and Rodriguez-Buckingham (1974), "Ethnohistoric Archaeology and the De Soto Entrada into the Lower Mississippi Valley"; Curren (1984), *The Protohistoric Period in Central Alabama*; DePratter (1983), "Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Chiefdoms in the Southeastern United States"; Dye (1989b), *Towns and Temples along the Mississippi*; Morse and Morse (1983), *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley*; Bruce Smith (1986), "The Archaeology of the Southeastern United States: From Dalton to De Soto, 10,500-500 B.P."; Marvin Smith (1987), *Archaeology of Aboriginal Culture Change in the Interior Southeast: Depopulation during the Early Historic Period*; and Walthall (1980), *Prehistoric Indians of the Southeast: Archaeology of Alabama and the Middle South*. Again, these

references are intended only as the starting place for any research in their respective areas.

There are many individual site reports that claim a connection with the De Soto entrada. Some, if not all, of these will require further research to satisfy the skeptical or even the credulous. Thus cautioned, the reader may wish to consult the following works: for Anhaica (Ewen 1989a, 1989b; B. C. Jones 1988); for Coosa (Boyd and Schroedl 1987; DeJarnette 1958; Hudson et al. 1985, 1987b); for Casqui (H. Davis 1966; Klinger 1977; P. Morse 1981); for Mauvilla (Little 1988c); and for Cofitechequi (DePratter 1989). Along the general route there is a host of protohistoric sites, which the army may have visited or influenced in some way. The bulk of the archaeological site reports listed in the bibliography fall into this category.

One of the major questions concerning the impact of the expedition is whether or not De Soto and his men were responsible for spreading epidemic diseases throughout the Southeast and decimating the native inhabitants. This issue is dealt with on a regional level by Blakely and Mathews (1990), Dobyns (1983), Milner (1980), Ramenofsky (1982, 1987, 1990), and M. Smith (1984a, 1987, 1989a). On the site level, the immediate effects of the De Soto entrada are examined at the King Site in a volume edited by Blakely (1988) and at the Tatham Mound by Hutchinson (1990) and Mitchem and Hutchinson (1986, 1987). Not everyone blames the protohistoric demographic shifts on De Soto, however; Burnett and Murray (1991) point to natural factors in northeast Arkansas that may have contributed to the depopulation of that area.

Artifact Studies

Artifact studies are an important part of the De Soto literature. Because they are readily identifiable and afford tangible evidence of the passing of the expedition, Spanish artifacts are hailed by archaeologists as solid evidence of De Soto contact. Whether the Spaniards were ever actually at the site where these artifacts were deposited is another issue entirely since all of these artifacts are highly portable. Nevertheless, they are useful diagnostic tools, and much effort has been expended in their study. These artifact studies usually fall into one of two categories: 1) general studies on the kinds of artifacts that have been found at De Soto-related sites; 2) specific studies concerning a specific type of artifact (e.g., beads) and its relevance to De Soto research.

General studies attempt to answer the question "What kind of artifacts

have been found on De Soto sites?" or sometimes "What kind of artifacts are likely to be found on De Soto sites?" These questions are addressed for the route-wide studies by Brain (1975); Curren, Little, and Corey (1991); DePratter and Smith (1987); Eubanks (1991a); Milanich and Mitchem (1986); Mitchem (1989a); Polhemus and Smith (1980); and M. Smith (1976). On a more site-specific level, M. Smith examines the European materials recovered from the King Site (1975) and the Little Egypt Site (1979). General guides for sixteenth-century artifacts in the Southeast include: Deagan (1987) and South, Skowronek, and Johnson (1988).

Many of these artifact studies focus on a single class of artifact. Beads are often used as a temporally diagnostic index artifact. Studies of De Soto-era beads have been undertaken by Eubanks (1991d), Floyd (1990), Francis (1986, 1987), Harris (1982), Mitchem and Leader (1988), M. Smith (1982, 1983, 1989b), and M. Smith and Good (1982). Metal artifacts found on protohistoric sites are also often associated with the De Soto expedition. Specific artifacts such as weaponry (Dickinson 1987, Little 1985, D. Morse 1988), bells (Heath 1991, Mitchem and McEwan 1988), and coins (M. Smith 1984b) are subsumed under this category. Other miscellaneous artifact studies include a curious Catholic/Aztec artifact (Langford 1990) and a debate over a spatulate axe from Demopolis, Alabama (Little et al. 1989a, 1989b; M. Smith 1989e).

Biographical Studies

Virtually every United States history text mentions Hernando de Soto, if only for his "discovery" of the Mississippi River. The man himself, however, has received short shrift in the literature, when compared to other explorers, and is, indeed, considered to be one of the lesser conquistadors by the Spaniards. Many of the biographies of De Soto were written in the late nineteenth century (Abbott 1898, Chadwick 1891, Villanueva 1892, Wilmer 1858) or early twentieth century (Bayle 1930; Graham 1924; W. Malone 1914; Solar y Taboada 1929). Later biographical sketches tend to be part of larger studies, such as Lockart's (1972) *Men of Cajamarca*, which examined the Spaniards involved in the conquest of Peru. Curiously, even with the 450th anniversary of the entrada and the 500th anniversary of the Columbus voyage at hand, few recent biographies of De Soto have been published.

Some biographical works have a definite agenda, of which the reader should be aware. For example, two works that tend to perpetuate *la leyenda*

blanca or glorify the Spaniards' role in the New World are: *Hernando de Soto: Knight of the Americas* (Albornoz 1986) and *Hernando de Soto: El Centauro de las Indias* (Blanco Castillo 1955). These are of interest in that their interpretation of De Soto's exploits in the New World tends to conflict with the politically correct thinking of today. Another interesting biographical work is Avellaneda's (1990) *Los Sobrevivientes de la Florida: The Survivors of the De Soto Expedition*, which includes information concerning personal histories of the Spaniards who survived the expedition.

De Soto in Fiction

Although some may argue that many of the above-mentioned works constitute works of fiction, unless the author thinks so we have not included them as such here. The explicit works of fiction involving the exploits of Hernando de Soto are surprisingly few given the epic nature of the real-life expedition. Most of the early publications (John Jennings 1958, Littleton 1928, Lytle 1941, Steele 1956) are fairly standard action/romances. Such volumes have been the subject of a symposium paper by Ruiz-Fournells (1991). Recent works have told the story of the De Soto expedition in verse (Holford 1984, Peter 1983) or from the native point of view as in Piers Anthony's *Tatham Mound* (1991).

Conclusion

This brief introductory chapter is only intended to outline the scope of the available research pertaining to the De Soto entrada in the southeastern United States. The references mentioned in this chapter are only a fraction of the total volume of the literature related to De Soto. Our bibliography contains nearly seven hundred entries, but it also is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, we hope it may serve as a useful entry point for those pursuing research on De Soto.